



Testimony of  
**Stephen McKeever, First Vice President**  
AFT Connecticut, AFL-CIO

Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee  
February 25, 2014

***SB 18 An Act Concerning The English Language Learner Educator Incentive Program***

Good afternoon Senator Cassano, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Steve McKeever and I am the First Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of local unions representing more than 14,000 public school educators. It is on their behalf that I am testifying in support of SB 18, An Act Concerning the English Language Learner Educator Incentive Program.

AFT Connecticut applauds the committee's effort to address the important issue of bilingual education and incentivize educators to pursue a bilingual education endorsement. As you are surely aware, there is a shortage of bilingual educators in Connecticut. By providing significant grants and loan forgiveness contained in this bill, prospective teachers in preparation programs may become more aware of the shortage and give more serious consideration to pursuing this certification.

Bilingual education uses and develops the student's native language and culture to help the student acquire academic skills, positive self-concept skills and develop English proficiency. The model is based on research which asserts that to be successful in the mainstream, emergent bilingual students must continue to develop cognitive and linguistic skills in their native language, while they are learning English. This approach allows students to successfully transfer those abilities, skills and strategies to their new language. A student is fully transitioned into the mainstream curriculum program after he/she has reached a sufficient level of proficiency in English to ensure equal access to instruction in the mainstream classroom.

Some make the mistake to assume that once a student can converse in English, he or she will naturally perform well academically in English. But in fact, interpersonal and communication skills and cognitive learning skills are two very different things. Supporting native language literacy through extended bilingual education will produce the critical thinkers needed for the future of our state. That is why bilingual instruction is so important and why qualified bilingual teachers are in such demand.

In order to more fully address the shortage of certified bilingual educators, we suggest that you expand this bill to allow practicing teachers to also be eligible for these incentives. They may encourage certified teachers to return to higher education to fulfill bilingual endorsement requirements.

We urge you to support SB 18 and to extend these proposed incentives to practicing teachers who seek to comply with bilingual education endorsement requirements. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.